

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) An absorbent structure, comprising:
a central longitudinal region;
two distal longitudinal regions located along opposite sides of the central longitudinal region; and

an absorbent material at least partially stabilized with a binder material and located in the central longitudinal region and in each of the two distal longitudinal regions, wherein the absorbent material is more stabilized in the central longitudinal region than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions;

wherein a) the central longitudinal region includes a higher concentration of bond points than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions, or b) the absorbent structure has an essentially uniform bond point concentration across the central longitudinal region and the two distal longitudinal regions.

2. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the central longitudinal region includes a higher concentration of bond points than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions.

3. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the absorbent structure has an essentially uniform bond point concentration across the central longitudinal region and the two distal longitudinal regions.

4. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the central longitudinal region comprises a first binder material, and each of the two distal longitudinal regions comprises a second binder material having a higher melting point than the first binder material.

5. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the central longitudinal region comprises a greater binder-material-to-absorbent-material ratio than a binder-material-to-absorbent-material ratio in each of the two distal longitudinal regions.

6. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 5, wherein the binder-material-to-absorbent-material ratio in the central longitudinal region is about 3% by weight or greater.

7. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 5, wherein the binder-material-to-absorbent-material ratio in each of the two distal longitudinal regions is less than about 3% by weight.

8. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the amount of stabilization in the absorbent material varies in a z-direction through the absorbent structure.

9. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the concentration by weight of absorbent material is essentially the same in the central region as in each of the two distal longitudinal regions.

10. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material and the binder material are homogeneously mixed in the central longitudinal region and in the two distal longitudinal regions.

11. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the binder material comprises at least one of the group consisting of binder fibers, continuous extruded fibers, discontinuous extruded fibers, adhesive fibers, non-adhesive fibers, non-elastomeric fibers, elastomeric fibers, sprayed liquid binder, and combinations thereof.

12. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the binder material comprises bicomponent staple fibers.

13. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material comprises an airformed composite.

14. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material comprises fiberized pulp fibers.

15. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, wherein the absorbent material comprises superabsorbent material.

16. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, further comprising a non-stabilized layer of absorbent material in contact with a surface of the at least partially stabilized absorbent material.

17. (Original) The absorbent structure of Claim 1, having a gradual stabilization profile between the central longitudinal region and the two distal longitudinal regions.

18. (Currently Amended) An absorbent article, comprising:
an outer cover;
a body side liner; and
an absorbent structure positioned between the outer cover and the body side liner, wherein the absorbent structure comprises a central longitudinal region, two distal longitudinal regions located along opposite sides of the central longitudinal region, and an absorbent material located in the central longitudinal region and in each of the two distal longitudinal regions, with the absorbent material more stabilized in the central longitudinal region than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions;

wherein a) the central longitudinal region includes a higher concentration of bond points than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions, or b) the absorbent structure has an essentially uniform bond point concentration across the central longitudinal region and the two distal longitudinal regions.

19. (Original) The absorbent article of Claim 18, wherein the central longitudinal region includes a higher concentration of bond points than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions.

20. (Original) The absorbent article of Claim 18, wherein the absorbent structure has an essentially uniform bond point concentration across the central longitudinal region and the two distal longitudinal regions.

21. (Original) The absorbent article of Claim 18, wherein the central longitudinal region comprises a first binder material, and each of the two distal longitudinal regions comprises a second binder material having a higher melting point than the first binder material.

22. (Original) The absorbent article of Claim 18, wherein the central longitudinal region comprises a greater binder-material-to-absorbent-material ratio than a binder-material-to-absorbent-material ratio in each of the two distal longitudinal regions.

23. (Original) The absorbent article of Claim 18, wherein the absorbent structure further comprises a non-stabilized layer of absorbent material in contact with a surface of the at least partially stabilized absorbent material.

24. (Original) The absorbent article of Claim 18, wherein the absorbent article is selected from the group consisting of diapers, training pants, swim wear, absorbent underpants, adult incontinence products, feminine care products, medical absorbent garments, bandages, masks, wound dressings, underpads, and wipes.

25. (Original) A method of forming an absorbent structure, comprising the steps of:

forming an absorbent material into an absorbent structure; and

at least partially stabilizing the absorbent material with a binder material such that the absorbent material is more stabilized in a central longitudinal region than in either of two distal longitudinal regions located along opposite sides of the central longitudinal region.

26. (Original) The method of Claim 25, further comprising the step of heating the absorbent structure to activate the binder material.

27. (Original) The method of Claim 25, comprising the step of activating the binder material in the central longitudinal region to a greater extent than the binder material in the two distal longitudinal regions.

28. (Original) The method of Claim 25, wherein the central longitudinal region comprises a first binder material, and each of the two distal longitudinal regions comprises a second binder material having a higher melting point than the first binder material.

29. (Original) The method of Claim 25, comprising stabilizing the absorbent structure by applying a greater concentration of binder material to the central longitudinal region of the absorbent structure than to either of the two distal longitudinal regions.

30. (Original) The method of Claim 25, further comprising the step of breaking a plurality of bond points in each of the two distal longitudinal regions.

31. (Original) The method of Claim 25, further comprising applying a non-stabilized layer of absorbent material to the at least partially stabilized absorbent material.

32. (New) An absorbent structure, comprising:
a central longitudinal region;
two distal longitudinal regions located along opposite sides of the central longitudinal region; and

an absorbent material at least partially stabilized with a binder material and located in the central longitudinal region and in each of the two distal longitudinal regions, wherein the absorbent material is more stabilized in the central longitudinal region than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions;

wherein the central longitudinal region comprises a first binder material, and each of the two distal longitudinal regions comprises a second binder material having a higher melting point than the first binder material.

33. (New) An absorbent article, comprising:

an outer cover;

a body side liner; and

an absorbent structure positioned between the outer cover and the body side liner, wherein the absorbent structure comprises a central longitudinal region, two distal longitudinal regions located along opposite sides of the central longitudinal region, and an absorbent material located in the central longitudinal region and in each of the two distal longitudinal regions, with the absorbent material more stabilized in the central longitudinal region than in either of the two distal longitudinal regions;

wherein the central longitudinal region comprises a first binder material, and each of the two distal longitudinal regions comprises a second binder material having a higher melting point than the first binder material.